

Title	Irish Americanization on Stage : How Irish Musicians, Playwrights, and Writers Created a New Urban American Culture, 1880-1940
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Citation	パブリック・ヒストリー. 10 p.54-p.74
Issue Date	2013-02
oaire:version	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/66514">https://doi.org/10.18910/66514</a>
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## Irish Americanization on Stage How Irish Musicians, Playwrights, and Writers Created a New Urban American Culture, 1880-1940

James R. Barrett

In January 1907 a wave of riots broke out in New York's theatres. Irish American audiences heckled actors, pelting them with rotten vegetables. Twenty-two men were arrested in one melee alone, though an Irish American judge dismissed all charges. Organized by the United Irish Societies, the protests were aimed at a vaudeville skit called "The Irish Servant Girl." Once one of vaudeville's most popular acts, the Russell Brothers had been performing it without incident for many years. Dressed in drag, the actors depicted dim-witted Irish maids, but now the protests forced the Russells out of New York and eventually out of vaudeville entirely.<sup>(1)</sup> "The Irish Servant Girl" reflected vaudeville's preoccupation with ethnic stereotypes, while the protests, part of a broader movement against ethnic caricature, were emblematic of evolving attitudes toward ethnic difference in the Irish American community and in urban society generally.

A new popular culture that reflected urban themes and a sense of realism reached maturity in the Great Depression era, but its roots lay earlier in the striking ethnic and racial diversity of the American city at the turn of the century. The curiosity and conflict this social difference engendered and the realities of social class in American cities emerged on stage and screen, in the narratives of late nineteenth century musical comedies, in early twentieth century vaudeville routines, in the pages of realist fiction, in the lyrics of Tin Pan Alley songs, and in newspaper columns and cartoon strips. Vaudeville – the variety shows embracing a series of music, comedy, and dance acts – became synonymous with this new urban culture that emerged between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s. This new culture was the product of interactions between the Irish and other city dwellers from diverse backgrounds. Irish efforts to interpret this urban diversity to themselves, to the immigrant peoples around them, and to the mainstream public reflected their biases toward and their conflicts with other ethnic groups, but they all reflected

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(1) My thanks to Kathy Oberdeck, Jenny Barrett, and Kotaro Nakano for their comments. Portions of this essay first appeared in *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multi-Ethnic City* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).

"Hissed Off the Stage by Angry Irishmen," *New York Times*, January 25, 1907, 3; "Egg Russell Brothers in a Brooklyn Theatre," *New York Times*, February 1, 1907, 1; M. Alison Kibler, "The Stage Irishwoman," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24 (Spring 2005), 5-7. See also, Geraldine Maschio, "Ethnic Humor and the Decline of the Russell Brothers," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26 (Summer 1992): 81-92; Kathryn J. Oberdeck, *The Evangelist and the Impresario: Religion, Entertainment and Cultural Politics in America, 1884-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 201.

life in the streets, and they shaped popular understandings of the American city. The cultural expressions the Irish passed on to more recent arrivals ranged from low humor to what came to be recognized as high literature.

## Blackface Irish

The roots of Irish American urban performance lay in Black face minstrelsy of the mid nineteenth century. Irish immigrants did not invent blackface minstrelsy, the first truly popular American cultural form. But they dominated the form in hundreds of national touring companies and thousands of local performances, and their stage performances continued to reflect minstrelsy's norms long after the form had declined. Profoundly racist, minstrelsy represented the sort of ethnic composite that came to characterize Irish American performance throughout the early twentieth century. As the United States became more ethnically diverse in the late nineteenth century, minstrel shows featured not only Irish immigrants taking on the personae of absurd Black characters in story, song, and dance, but also polka, Italian opera, German and Irish folk song, and other performances.<sup>(2)</sup>

The rather tenuous social footing of the Irish is evident in the fact that they had been the main focus of ethnic humor on the English stage for centuries by the time they reached the United States. Irish comic figures appeared in Shakespeare's plays and remained a central feature of British theatre from the seventeenth century through the Victorian era. This "stage Irishman" stereotype transferred easily to the nineteenth century American scene; traces of the tradition continued into the twentieth.<sup>(3)</sup>

Blackface minstrelsy was central to the formation of white supremacist values in the nineteenth century U.S. – generally and among the despised Irish Catholic minority in particular.<sup>(4)</sup> Irish performers employed blackface to ridicule and distance themselves from African Americans in the course of establishing their own white identity, assuming a crucial role in the formation and reproduction of racist values. They took on other ethnic roles as well, and actors from a variety of ethnic backgrounds also took on comic Irish personae. In the process, stage performers interpreted an increasingly complex social world to audiences from a variety of backgrounds.

The stock ethnic characters in nineteenth century ethnic music hall and theatre, Paddy, the

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(2) Mick Moloney, "Irish-American Popular Music," in Lee and Casey, eds. *Making the Irish American* (New York, 2005), 382, quote, 383. See also, Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 118-119.

(3) On the British tradition, see G.C. Duggan, *The Stage Irishman: A History of the Irish Play and Stage Characters from the Earliest Times* (London: Longman's Green, 1937); Declan Kiberd, "The Fall of the Stage Irishman," *Genre: A Quarterly Devoted to Generic Criticism* 12 (Winter 1979), 451-54; and Kathleen Donovan, "Good Old Pat: An Irish American Stereotype in Decline," *Eire-Ireland* 15:3 (1980): 6-14. On derogatory comic caricature in nineteenth century British print culture, see L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (revised ed., Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1997).

(4) Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 133-163; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*; Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, 1996), 56-58, Moloney, "Irish-American Popular Music," 383.

drunken and stupid stage Irishman, and his partner Biddy, the lovable but stupid Irish maid, were probably at the height of their popularity in the midst of the later Irish immigration of the 1880s. Like the Black characters Sambo and Mose in minstrelsy, these were comic characters that fed on racism and discrimination. Even when they laughed at them, the Irish resented such stereotypes.<sup>(5)</sup>

## The American Dickens

Astride the older musical variety shows of the 1860s and 1870s and the emerging vaudeville explosion at the end of the century stood the musician, performer, and playwright Edward Harrigan (1844-1911), the “American Dickens.” Born on the Lower East Side, that classic crucible of immigrant culture, and steeped in Irish American culture, Harrigan witnessed the city’s ethnic transformation firsthand. He created a series of enormously popular late nineteenth century plays portraying ethnic life on the city’s Lower East Side. Harrigan and his collaborators, his father-in-law David Braham, the son of an Orthodox Jew, and Tony Hart, a second generation Irish American, all shared extensive minstrel experience. They graduated from songs, sketches, and dialogues to full fledged musicals which captured the imagination of late nineteenth century New Yorkers who saw their city changing about them. The fact that 23 of his plays each ran for more than one hundred performances, while hundreds of thousands of copies of his songs circulated on sheet music throughout the United States demonstrates Harrigan’s popularity. His main theme was the relations between the Irish and a range of other ethnic groups.

Harrigan’s own goal was clear enough. “Though I use types and never individuals,” he wrote, “I try to be as realistic as possible.” His characters, locations, and situations were exaggerated but easily recognizable. His lyrics employed familiar slang and dialect and he purchased his costumes directly from individuals on the streets of New York. His setting, carefully designed with an eye to detail, was invariably “Five Points,” New York’s most famous slum, his characters assorted immigrant politicians, petty merchants, washer women, laborers, and cops.<sup>(6)</sup> The middle class nationalist John Finerty’s complaint that Harrigan and Hart produced “drama from the slums” was not far off the mark. “Mr. Harrigan realizes in his scenes what he realizes in his persons,” the critic William Dean Howells wrote at the time. “He cannot give it all... and he has preferred to give its Irish American phases in their rich and amusing variety, and some of its African and Teutonic phases.”<sup>(7)</sup>

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(5) On the nineteenth century American stage Irishman in New York, Chicago, and elsewhere, see Dale T. Knobel, “A vocabulary of Ethnic Perception: Content Analysis of the American Stage Irishman, 1820-1860,” *Journal of American Studies* 15 (1981): 45-71; Patricia L. Ireland, “Blarney Streets: The Staging of Ireland and Irish-America by the Chicago Manuscript Company,” PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1998, 201 and passim.

(6) “Mr. Harrigan as Actor and Maker of ‘Documents,’” *New York Times* September 3, 1893, 16; Harley Erdman, *Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860-1920* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 89.

(7) Moloney, “Irish-American Popular Music,” 389; Harrigan quoted, “American Playwrights on the American Drama,”

Harrigan brought his own well developed sense of racial hierarchy to his creations and held the Irish up as a sort of model.<sup>(8)</sup> Yet along with this notion of hierarchy came a very real appreciation for the city's diversity. Harrigan's lyrics captured both the casual ethnic prejudice and the unmistakable fascination with urban diversity that characterized much of Irish American culture.

Relations between these groups were often antagonistic. The *Boston Herald* called Harrigan's plays a "war of the races in cosmopolitan New York," and this was particularly true in the case of Chinese.<sup>(9)</sup> Yet Harrigan's play also alluded to the presence of Chinese-Irish couples, a common theme in late nineteenth century song lyrics and musical variety performance but also a sensitive issue at the time.<sup>(10)</sup> This competition hit the New York stage before audiences constituted heavily of Irish Americans who resented the encroachment of the Chinese. The laundry became a frequent site of ethnic tension and the source for racism among Irish women, as in the popular song "Since the Chinese Ruined the Thrade":

"It makes me wild, whin I'm on the street,  
To see those haythen signs:  
Ah Sung, Ah Sing, Sam Lee, Ah Wing,  
An' the ilegant spread on ther lines.  
If iver I get me hands on Ah Sing,  
I'll make him Ah Sing indade –  
On me clothesline I'll pin the leather skin  
Of the haythen that ruint the thrade."<sup>(11)</sup>

Harrigan's lyrics resonated in the Irish American community because they reflected very real attitudes toward the Chinese and concrete changes in New York's labor market. When the

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*Harper's Weekly*, February 2, 1889, 98; W. D. Howells, *Selected Literary Criticism, Volume II: 1886-1897*, ed. David J. Nordloh (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 25, both quoted in Jon W. Finson, "Realism in the Late Nineteenth Century American Musical Theatre: The Songs of Edward Harrigan and David Braham," *Collected Songs: Edward Harrigan and David Braham*, ed. Jon W. Finson, vols. 27-28 of *Music of the United States of America* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), xxvii. Finerty quoted, Charles Fanning, *Finley Peter Dunne and Mr. Dooley: The Chicago Years* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 158. For a sketch of Five Points in the era of Harrigan's greatest popularity, see "Not for Open Saloons," *New York Times* January 25, 1895, 9.

(8) Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s-1920s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 53. See also, James H. Dormon, "Ethnic Cultures of the Mind: The Harrigan-Hart Mosaic," *American Studies* 33 (Summer 1992), passim.

(9) Quoted in E. J. Kahn Jr., *The Merry Partners: The Age and Stage of Harrigan and Hart* (New York: Random House, 1955), 69.

(10) Mixed race Irish/Chinese marriages remained popular in early twentieth century plays like *Patsy O'Wang, An Irish Farce with a Chinese Mix-Up*. See Robert G. Lee, *Oriental: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 78-81.

(11) Harrigan's play and the street tune are both quoted in Moon, *Yellowface*, 50. On the rise of the Chinese hand laundry, see Mary Tin Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 55-58; and on the laundryman's perceived femininity, Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 92-93.

anti-Chinese agitation began to gather steam in New York in the late 1870s, the competition between Irish women and Chinese men for laundry work represented a specter haunting the Irish. “They have already two hundred laundries in New York,” the Irish World reported. “Six months ago they had not twenty.” “Their passage to San Francisco costs less than a steerage passage from Liverpool to New York. And crowded up in China there are some 400,000,000 of them, and they can live on ten cents a day.”<sup>(12)</sup>

What separated Harrigan’s plays from earlier minstrelsy and later musical theatre, both of which included extensive ethnic performance, was the extended interaction between ethnic groups. In *The Mulligan Guards’ Ball* (1879), inter-ethnic marriage was a central theme. Dan Mulligan and wife Cordelia are at odds with their neighbors the Lochmullers in part because they fear that their son Tommy will marry Katrina Lochmuller. (Ironically, Tommy’s own mother is not German but Irish.) Blacks, Germans and Irish are often in conflict with one another, but they also find common ground.

Another of Dan Mulligan’s antagonists, Sim Primrose, leader of the competing African American Skidmore Guard, runs a barbershop that provides such common ground for the various ethnic groups. Sim complains loudly of the cost to launder his towels with the Irish washer woman and threatens to turn to the neighborhood’s Chinese laundryman. Class tensions and anxieties also abound. The main characters are not workers but small businesspeople looking for the means to rise – a reflection of Irish America’s struggling lower middle class. The play’s *denouement* comes when the competing Black and Irish guard units schedule their fancy balls on the same day at the same building. The Black couples dance with such enthusiasm in the hall above that the floor collapses and they literally fall to the level of the Irish in the hall below.<sup>(13)</sup>

These were certainly comic scenes, but they differed significantly from those in minstrelsy where stereotypical characters like “Mose” or “Pat” appeared on stage only briefly to sing, dance, or deliver stock jokes. They seldom interacted and there was no story line. Harrigan invested his African American, Irish, and other characters with greater depth and agency and brought them into sustained conversation with one another.

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(12) *Irish World and Industrial Liberator*, July 12, 1879, 5. On the working-class base of the anti-Chinese movement, see Alexander Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy: labor and the anti-Chinese movement in California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971) and on the conflict between Chinese men and Irish women, Moon, *Yellowface*, 49–51.

(13) On *The Mulligan Ball*, see Dennis McNulty, “Blackface as Irish Mask? Liminality and Resistance in Irish Blackface Performance,” 2005, unpublished seminar paper in the author’s possession; Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, 71–76; Catherine Eagan, “‘I Did Imagine ... We Had Ceased to Be White-Washed Negroes’: The Racial Formation of Irish Identity in Ireland and America,” PhD diss, Boston College, 2000; on the musical renderings of Chinese-Irish intermarriage, Moon, *Yellow Face*, 51–52; and on the affinity between Irish and African Americans in Harrigan’s plays, Robert Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 247, 249.

## Vaudeville: Americanization on the Stage

With their urban tenement setting, their concern with ethnic difference and race relations, their often crude characterizations of various racial and ethnic groups, and their enormous popularity among immigrants and their children, the Harrigan musicals represented in some ways an overture to George M. Cohan's vaudeville.<sup>(14)</sup> Vaudeville theatre stood at the very center of popular culture in the increasingly diverse turn-of-the-century American city. Through its songs, dances, and jokes, vaudeville integrated immigrant city life into a national theater industry and set the stage for modern American show business.<sup>(15)</sup>

Characterized by cheap variety acts that ran continuously through the day and evening, vaudeville was designed as family entertainment with a little something for everyone. Like minstrelsy, it spoke to the displaced rural migrant coping with daily life in the big city and trying to make sense of the people around him/her. No group had been more deeply immersed in this experience and its expression on stage than the Irish. For them, blackface performance had been a ritual of Americanization, and they remained center stage with the emergence of vaudeville which became the same sort of ritual for later immigrants.<sup>(16)</sup> But now the performers, their audiences, and the urban life they recreated were far more diverse.

Vaudeville theatres of various sizes and quality sprouted in big city neighborhoods, and their performers also toured smaller towns throughout the country. This brought aspects of the urban life and culture that disparate ethnic groups held in common before a much larger national audience and set the stage for the electronically-based movie and radio mass culture of the interwar years.<sup>(17)</sup>

New York City audiences were drawn from a remarkable social spectrum. Nearly two-thirds came from the working-class, while the comparable figure for the "legitimate theatre" was only two percent. But the vaudeville audience also included vagrants and "gamins," and more than one-third came from clerical occupations. The overwhelming majority of the audience was comprised of working adults and more than a third was female.<sup>(18)</sup>

Vaudeville attracted more settled immigrants and their children because of the language factor, but skits often employed a mixture of English, Yiddish, and other languages, and physical

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(14) Toll quoted in Joyce Flynn, "Melting Plots: Patterns of Racial and Ethnic Amalgamation in American Drama before Eugene O'Neill," *American Quarterly*, 38 (1986), 430.

(15) Robert W. Snyder, "The Irish and Vaudeville," in *Making the Irish American*, eds., J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 406.

(16) Alexander Saxton, "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology," *American Quarterly* 27 (1975), 14-15; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 119; Lott, *Love and Theft*, 190-91.

(17) Robert W. Snyder, "Big Time, Small Time, All around the Town: New York Vaudeville in the Early Twentieth Century," in *For Fund and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia, 1990), 119. For a careful delineation of various kinds of theatres throughout the neighborhoods of New York, see Michael Davis, *The Exploitation of Pleasure* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1910).

(18) Davis, *Exploitation of Pleasure*, Table 8, 30. See also, David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 23-32.



comedy insured laughs even when audiences faced a language barrier. After small, cheap “nickelodeon” film arcades were added to neighborhood houses, even recent immigrants were drawn into the vaudeville orbit, as the new silent films required little command of English.<sup>(19)</sup> Increasingly, such mass leisure was an experience that older immigrants like the Irish shared with more recent arrivals.

Vaudeville offered a common ground among the city’s social classes. The native born middle class found their more refined culture of restraint challenged by brash immigrant comedians, singers, and dancers.<sup>(20)</sup>

Irish performers could appeal to these mixed audiences for many reasons. They regularly took on the personae of other ethnic groups and peppered their performances with a good dose of self-deprecation, a characteristic of Irish humor. Even when it focused on Irish American themes, vaudeville resonated across ethnic lines with the urban experience of immigrant people and their children who were trying to grasp the diversity of the city world which furnished the main source for the material. The characters were stereotypes but they were based on racial, class, sexual, and ethnic stereotypes drawn from city streets.<sup>(21)</sup> As they morphed from minstrels to vaudeville performers, the Irish developed a distinctive style and an urban sensibility. They played a variety of ethnic groups, and these groups likewise took on the persona of Irish characters.

As vaudeville blossomed, there were Dutch (German), Jewish, Irish, Black, and Italian acts performed by artists from a bewildering array of backgrounds. In this tendency to ethnically cross-dress, vaudeville owed a great deal to minstrelsy. Like its forerunner, it was a distinctly American art form with its preoccupation with ethnic and racial difference. This humor could be intentionally crude and often insulting to the targeted group, but its popularity with immigrants themselves demonstrates what the cultural historian Joyce Flynn calls a “cautious cosmopolitanism.” Stereotypes served to categorize the multitude of others inhabiting the city. They might console the Irish and other older groups about their higher place in this evolving ethnic hierarchy, but there is no doubt of their popularity among later immigrants and especially their children. Audiences were drawn to the very diversity that characterized their neighborhoods and their daily lives.<sup>(22)</sup>

While late nineteenth century songs and musicals often reflected tensions between the Irish and the Chinese, turn-of-the-century vaudeville songs and skits tended to focus on racist comparisons between the Chinese and African Americans. Kelly and Catlin’s routine “The Coon

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(19) Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences, From Stage to Television* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 141-146; Davis, *Exploitation of Pleasure*, 30; Nasaw, *Going Out*, 168-71, 186-204.

(20) Snyder, “Big Time, Small Time,” 120.

(21) Gavin Roger Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 173-77; Moloney, “Irish American Popular Music,” quote, 387.

(22) Ibid.; Flynn, “Melting Plots,” 426, quote, 429; “Dramatic and Musical,” *New York Times*, Nov. 13, 1900, 6; Paul Antoine Distler, “Ethnic Comedy in Vaudeville and Burlesque,” in *American Popular Entertainment*, ed. Myron Matlaw (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 38; Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 53



and the Chink” featured the comedy team in black face and yellow face, portraying a range of derogatory stereotypes of the two groups. Drawing on long-standing nineteenth century tropes often employed by Irish American minstrels, such routines remained popular throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>(23)</sup> Irish American impersonators of the Chinese arrived on stage in “yellow face” at least as early as the 1870s, while Chinese impersonations of the Irish had arrived by the turn of the century. African American performers often displayed an uncanny ability to mimic the Irish brogue.<sup>(24)</sup> Again, it was the transgression of ethnic lines – the spectacle of a Chinese performer singing in Irish dialect, sometimes in Irish dress, which attracted audiences.

Such ethnic caricature signaled xenophobia and boundary-marking by native middle class audiences, but there was far more going on in the skits than an attack on one or another immigrant group. In larger and even in many of the smaller houses, both the vaudeville audience itself and its performers were ethnically mixed by the turn of the century. The comedy and performance thrived on this diversity. “The show dramatized the spectrum of humanity in the city,” urban historian Gunther Barth wrote, “and the diversity of urban life through its subject matter and variety.”<sup>(25)</sup>

The ethnic characters were stereotypes, but they often bore a resemblance to people that immigrants and their children were apt to see walking the streets of the Lower East Side, Chicago’s near West Side, and other immigrant neighborhoods. A critic noted “how quick patrons of vaudeville are to recognize an act that comes near to the truth.”<sup>(26)</sup> Each ethnic group was reduced to a distinct set of characteristics, some favorable, some unfavorable, but just enough reality made the scenes familiar, if not entirely plausible. Performers often integrated issues of local interest – political scandals, strikes, or international events – as they traveled around the country and through the neighborhoods of large cities. And it was this perceived authenticity as much as any slapstick humor that gave the acts their enormous popularity with remarkably diverse audiences. The performers’ evocation of urban situations and characters helped to make the immigrant audience’s surroundings more intelligible and negotiable.<sup>(27)</sup>

In these darkened theatres many immigrants learned about their new urban world. The great Jewish-American writers of the mid-twentieth century, literary critic Alfred Kazin wrote, were shaped not in the universities, but in vaudeville theatres, music halls, and burlesque houses “where the pent-up eagerness of the penniless immigrant youngsters met the raw urban

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(23) Moon, *Yellowface* 114.

(24) Moon, *Yellowface*, 140-42; Lee, *Orientalism*, 34-5, 61-5; Lott, *Love and Theft*, 48.

(25) Gunther Barth, *City People: the Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 193. See also, Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 232-33.

(26) Hartley Davis, “In Vaudeville,” *Everyone’s Magazine* 24 (August 1905), 238, quoted, Dormon, “European Immigrant/Ethnic Theatre,” 165.

(27) Snyder, “The Irish and Vaudeville,” 407; Paul Antoine Distler, “Ethnic Comedy in Vaudeville and Burlesque,” in *American Popular Entertainment*, Myron Matlaw, ed., (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 36; Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 14-16.

scene on its own terms.”<sup>(28)</sup> “Greenhorn” caricatures were particularly popular, perhaps because they allowed the more experienced immigrants and the Americanized second generation to distinguish themselves from these symbols of their old world pasts and to take on the mantle of sophisticated American city dwellers.<sup>(29)</sup>

One of the most popular acts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the Jewish comedy team of Weber and Fields who appeared in blackface impersonating African Americans, Germans and Irish. The very speed with which such comics sailed through a variety of ethnic groups was itself characteristic of vaudeville’s quick-change pace and variety. “Here we are, a colored pair,” Weber and Fields announced in heavy Yiddish accents and minstrel outfits. Then they quickly changed their ethnic make-up and costumes to fit the next stereotype – green satin breeches, black velvet coats, green bow ties, and green derbies to signal the Irish, but they changed not a word in any of their jokes. The audience loved seeing the Jewish comics singing Gaelic language songs in their Yiddish accents.<sup>(30)</sup> An Irish comic impersonating a Jewish or Chinese immigrant in heavy brogue likewise was considered hilarious.<sup>(31)</sup>

## Down with the Stage Irishman

Negative Irish caricatures were rife in the late 1880s and early 1890s, overlapping with the surging anti-Catholicism of those years. But as the Irish rose gradually in the early twentieth century, the crudest of the ethnic stereotypes departed the legitimate theatre and even became less acceptable in vaudeville.<sup>(32)</sup> Some of the comic laborers were replaced by ward politicians and small businessmen, but characters like “Mike Haggerty” who wore both the laborer’s hobnailed boots and a respectable frock coat, reflected the audience’s continuing anxieties about the experience of social climbing and the tensions between the Irish American middle and working classes. This is a theme that recurs throughout not only Irish American music, theatre, literature, and song, but the popular culture of Jews and other immigrant people as well.<sup>(33)</sup> One

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(28) Alfred Kazin quoted in Stephen Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 51. On the increasing diversity of vaudeville audiences, see Snyder, “Big Time, Small Time,” 125; M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Hierarchy in American Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 25; Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 34-6; Mary Carbine, “The Finest Outside the Loop: Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago’s Black Metropolis, 1905-1925,” *Camera Obscura* 23 (1990): 9-41. On the balance of slapstick, nostalgia, and urban realism, see Oberdeck, *The Evangelist and the Impresario*, 91-108.

(29) Nasaw, *Going Out*, 52-3.

(30) Armond Fields and L. Marc Fields, *From the Bowery to Broadway: Lew Fields and the Roots of American Popular Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 32-33, 85, first quote, 32; George Peter Murdock, ed., *Studies in the Science of Society* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), second quote, 21. See also, Moon, *Yellow Face*, 148-150.

(31) Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 56-58, quote, 56.

(32) Kathleen Donovan, “Good Old Pat: An Irish-American Stereotype in Decline,” *Eire-Ireland* 15 (1980): 6-14; Oberdeck, *The Evangelist and the Impresario*, 198-204; Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 60-69.

(33) Snyder, “Irish and Vaudeville,” 406-409, quote 407; Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 55-7, 63-4, 71-4; Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish American Fiction* (Lexington, KY, 2000), 179-182; Carl Wittke, “The Immigrant Theme on the American Stage,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39 (September 1952), 222-223. The comic pretensions of the upwardly

explanation for the fading of the caricatures, then, is a quest for respectability on the part of old “Pat” and “Biddy” or their offspring who had generated considerable social capital and political influence by the early twentieth century.

The theatre riots of which the Russell Brothers protests were a part require a related but more complex explanation. These protests highlighted a special concern with the status of Irish American women which surfaced in many of the other protests. Increasingly, vaudeville audiences objected to negative stereotypes. Irish dialect comedians were received with stony silence from Boston audiences. In other cases, viewers showered offensive actors with eggs and vegetables.<sup>(34)</sup>

The Ancient Order of Hibernians launched boycotts against stage Irishmen in Chicago, Philadelphia, and elsewhere, and by 1904 they were also calling for an end to Irish comic stereotypes in cartoons and newspaper features. New York’s United Irish Societies began collecting reports of performances “that brought the Celtic people into plain contempt.”<sup>(35)</sup> Reporting on a comedian, a Boston manager wrote the home office in 1903, “Look out and have him cut his comedy Irishman if your town is strongly A.O.H. [Ancient Order of Hibernians].”<sup>(36)</sup> The protests had some effect. Comic Irish characters, which had been a staple in the 1890s, did not vanish, but they diminished considerably.

Irish Americans had roared at some of the cruder caricatures in Harrigan’s plays and in musical variety shows; now many of them had stopped laughing. Why? Social class, social mobility, and audience composition certainly explain part of the change. More subdued Irish comic caricatures persisted in vaudeville where audiences were more mixed in class and ethnic terms. The audience in legitimate theatre and musicals plays, however, was relatively more respectable by the turn of the century and the Irish Americans among them were often particularly sensitive. In this sense, the reaction was one example of what literary historian Charles Fanning has called “the seismic shocks to the Irish-American community brought on by the emergence of a middle class.”<sup>(37)</sup>

Historian Kerby Miller found the late nineteenth century Irish American bourgeoisie “morbidly sensitive to real or imagined threats to their tenuous grasp on respectability.” The resurgence of anti-Catholicism in the 1890s, aimed largely at Irish Americans, undoubtedly

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mobile Irish was a constant refrain in Finley Peter Dunne’s popular “Mister Dooley” columns and books.

(34) Patricia Ireland, “Blarney Streets: The Staging of Ireland and Irish-Americans by the Chicago Manuscript Company,” PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1998, 197-98; *New York Tribune*, March 28, 1903, 1; Managers’ Report Book, page 252, Boston, April 27, 1903, Keith/Albee Collection, Special Collections, University of Iowa Library. My thanks to M. Alison Kibler.

(35) “Irish Comedian Must Go,” *Chicago Tribune*, May, 1902, 1; M. Alison Kibler, “Pigs, Green Whiskers, and Drunken Widows: Irish Nationalists and the ‘Practical Censorship’ of McFadden’s Row of Flats in 1902 and 1903,” *Journal of American Studies*, 42 (December) 2008: 489-514; Donovan, “Good Old Pat,” 13. The United Irish Societies quote is in Oberdeck, *The Evangelist and the Impresario*, 201. See also Nasaw, *Going Out*, 167.

(36) Oberdeck, *The Evangelist and the Impresario*, 343-49; Report Book 8, 124, Keith/Albee Collection, quoted, Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 56.

(37) Fanning, *Irish Voice in America*, 219.

heightened such anxieties.<sup>(38)</sup> This search for respectability helps to explain why some of the most brilliant Irish American writers, like Eugene O'Neill, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John O'Hara pursued acceptance from upper class WASPS while isolated from and despised by the Irish American middle class whom they satirized.<sup>(39)</sup>

Yet there was another source for such protests – a newly-militant, more muscular Irish nationalism. The Russell Brothers protest and other theatre riots were not spontaneous, but rather organized by the Gaelic League, Clan na Gael and A.O.H. They were populated largely by working-class males and exhibited a belligerent masculinity that came to the fore in the emergent nationalist agitation.<sup>(40)</sup> This more militant nationalist culture was rising in precisely these years, reaching its zenith during World War One and the early twenties to become a mass movement embracing hundreds of thousands of working-class Irish Americans. In this context, such performances touched a nerve in the broader Irish American community, not just its middle class. Far enough to command some degree of respect, Irish Americans were close enough to their despised origins in Ireland and American cities to resent any slight.<sup>(41)</sup>

“Some day,” a vaudeville manager wrote the home office in 1903, “the Hebrews are going to make as big a kick as the Irish did against this kind of burlesque of their nationality.”<sup>(42)</sup> And indeed other ethnic communities soon voiced their own objections to such stereotypes. Negative African American stereotypes were particularly persistent, but agitation within the Black community forced vaudeville management to limit the number and roughness of “coon” acts in the early twentieth century.<sup>(43)</sup> When Jews launched their own protests, they distinguished, as Irish protesters had, between ethnic humor per se and offensive caricatures in particular. They also modeled their boycotts and agitation on those the Irish. Dr. Emil Hirsch, a founder of Anti-Defamation League in Chicago in 1913, highlighted the difference in the depictions of Irish and Jews. “A stage Irishman is funny and not offensive because he is a good humored caricature,” Hirsch reasoned. “We wouldn’t mind being laughed at in that way.” Many Jewish

(38) On Irish defensiveness and an obsession with respectability, see Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 497-99, quote, 498; Thomas Rowland, “Irish Americans and the Quest for Respectability in the Coming of the Great War, 1900-1917,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 15 (Winter 1996): 3-31. On the changing composition of the audience in musical theatre at the end of the nineteenth century, see James H. Dormon, “Ethnic Cultures of the Mind: The Harrigan-Hart Mosaic,” *American Studies* 33 (Summer 1992), 37.

(39) Fanning, *Irish Voice in America*, 153-76; Chris McNickle, “When New York Was Irish, and After,” in Bayor and Meagher, eds. *New York Irish*, 345-46.

(40) Kibler, “The Stage Irishwoman,” 5-30; Kibler, “Pigs, Green Whiskers, and Drunken Widows,” 11-14. The characterization of “belligerent masculinity” is from Meagher, *Making of Irish America*, 243. On the working-class character of the AOH, see Miller, *Emigrant and Exiles*, 534-35. See also “Riot in Theatre over an Irish Play,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1911, 1, 3; “Egg Riot at Theatre; Irishmen in a Rage,” *New York Tribune*, March 28, 1903, 1.

(41) Timothy Meagher, “Introduction,” in *From Paddy to Studs: Irish American Communities in Turn of the Century Era, 1880-1920*, Timothy Meagher, ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 2.

(42) Managers Report Book 0, page 297, Boston, April 27, 1903, Keith/Albee Collection. My thanks to M. Alison Kibler for this reference.

(43) Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 34-36; Nasaw, *Going Out*, 53-56, 167-68.

stage characters were more sinister.<sup>(44)</sup>

Irish comic caricatures, which had been a staple at the turn of the century, declined in the decade before World War One, while “Hebrew” and other caricatures persisted. By the early 1920s, at which point a second generation was maturing in even more recent immigrant communities, vaudeville performers themselves expressed reservations about ethnic acts and hesitated to employ ethnic dress and stock ethnic caricatures.<sup>(45)</sup>

## The Irish and the Jews

Tin Pan Alley songs, which enjoyed huge popularity in the decade before the First World War and through the 1920s, were often based on traditional Irish melodies and themes, invoking nostalgia for an idealized Ireland that city dwellers pined for – even if it never existed. To the extent that the Irish were moving up, it was precisely this distance from their roots that produced such nostalgia in the second and third generations. The Irish remained as both creators and subjects of Tin Pan Alley lyrics in sheet music, recordings, and live performance, but they were often in dialogue with racial and ethnic others. In “The Kellys,” a young immigrant from Cork encounters both the ubiquitous Irish and their diverse neighbors:

I went to the directory me uncle for to find  
But I found so many Kellys that I nearly lost me mind.  
So I went to ask directions from a friendly German Jew  
But he says please excuse me but me name is Kelly too.

Dan Kelly runs the railroads, John Kelly runs the seas  
Kate Kelly runs the suffragettes and she looks right good to me.  
Well I went and asked directions from a naturalized Chinese  
But he says please excuse me but me name it is Kell Lee.<sup>(46)</sup>

Filled with a good deal of self-congratulation and nostalgia for the “old sod,” lyrics were less the products of the immigrants themselves than of a second generation probing its place in American society in relation to other ethnic groups. The fact that stock Irish characters who had frequently been depicted as drunks or buffoons in vaudeville skits were less common in Tin Pan Alley numbers is explained in part by social mobility, often at the expense of recent immigrants

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(44) “All Races to War on Play Ridicule,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 25, 1913, 5; quote, “Anti-Defamation Move Becomes Nationwide,” November 14, 1913, 14; “To Boycott the State Jew,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1913, 3.

(45) Oberdeck, *The Evangelist and the Impresario*, 341-49; “Stage Folk Dispute Virtues of Make-Up,” *New York Times* July 15, 1923, E6.

(46) Lyrics in Mick Moloney, *Far from the Shamrock Shore: the Story of Irish-American Immigration through Song* (New York: Crown, 2002), 34.

and Blacks. Some songs, however, reflected increasingly close relations between the Irish and other ethnic groups.

Lyrics often depicted Irish men and women roaming the world and encountering a wide range of others. Intermarriage was a common theme, with Irish men marrying or courting Indian, Hawaiian, or Arab women.<sup>(47)</sup> The continuing marginality of the Irish was reflected in the sense that audiences laughed at the thought of the Irishman in exotic locations, so central was he to images of the working class and the American city.

By far the most common pairing, however, in such comic romantic songs was the Irish/Jewish match, as in “My Yiddisha Colleen” and “It’s Tough When Izzy Rosenstein Loves Genevieve Malone.” The humor tended to be more at the expense of the Jews than the Irish, but it displayed a clear affinity between the two groups.<sup>(48)</sup> Irish Catholics and Jews, two of the nation’s most successful ethnic groups, shared a history of oppression in the old world, conspicuous urban settlement and persistence in the new, and an equal distribution of men and women. In the politics of the early twentieth century period, the Irish Tammany Hall political machine was coming to terms with the increasingly large and well organized Jewish community. And between them, the two groups dominated the entertainment industry.<sup>(49)</sup> The 1912 William Jerome (Flannery) and Jean Schwartz number “If It Wasn’t for the Irish and the Jews” conveyed these affinities:

Talk about a combination,  
Hear my words and make a note,  
On St. Patrick’s Day Rosinsky,  
Pins a shamrock on his coat.  
There’s a sympathetic feeling,  
Between the Blooms and McAdoos,  
Why Tammany would surely fall,  
There’d really be no hall at all,  
If it wasn’t for the Irish and the Jews.<sup>(50)</sup>

Inter-ethnic love and marriage was a common theme first in vaudeville and then in early films, and it became particularly popular with the second generation in the Irish and other immigrant communities. In the early 1920s, the movie, play, and novel *Abie’s Irish Rose* captured the imagination of a wide segment of the U.S. public. It sympathetically told the story of the love between a second generation Jewish immigrant man and a second generation Irish

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(47) Williams, “Twas Only an Irishman’s Dream,” 192-94.

(48) Williams, “Twas Only an Irishman’s Dream,” quote, 190.

(49) Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 57-8.

(50) This and the previous paragraph draw on Williams, “Twas Only an Irishman’s Dream,” 194-99, song lyrics quoted, 196. See also, Moloney, “Irish-American Popular Music,” 393-96; Moloney, *Far from the Shamrock Shore*, 36-7.



American woman. Rose's father, Patrick Murphy, a contractor from County Kerry, represented one possible response to such a match, his priest, another. Patrick is full of ethnic humor and stories about youthful Jewish-Irish fights in the streets of New York. Objecting to the proposed marriage on the basis of stereotypes, Patrick is confronted on his anti-Semitism by Father Whalen, who represents a strain of ethnic and racial tolerance within the Irish American community. The play was wildly successful, running for over 2,300 performances on Broadway, a record that persisted for fourteen years. It also set records in Erie, Pennsylvania and South Bend, Indiana, home of Notre Dame University. By the summer of 1926, some 5 million had seen it. It spawned film adaptations, in 1928 and 1946, a weekly radio show during World War Two, and was revived twice on Broadway.<sup>(51)</sup>

With its roots in vaudeville ethnic humor, Abie's Irish Rose embodied the second and third immigrant generation's anxieties and aspirations. It signaled a much broader cultural phenomenon that featured Irish-Jewish relationships in scores of ragtime songs, in other stage productions, and in twenty-one other films between 1921 and 1930. Quintessentially nostalgic Irish Tin Pan Alley songs like "Mother Malone" and "Twas Only an Irishman's Dream" were actually the creations of Jewish-Irish teams. Comic and romantic pairings were a staple on the vaudeville stage, and sports fans followed the antics of Jewish and Irish roommates on the New York Giants and the Chicago White Sox.<sup>(52)</sup> By the twenties, if not earlier, rabbis or other representatives of the Jewish community often spoke at St. Patrick's Day celebrations. Clearly, Irish-Jewish couplings resonated widely and had meaning for their audiences. What was going on here?

One distinct possibility was that the pairing was so unlikely, given cultural differences and frequent conflicts in politics and on the streets, that it was inherently comical. Though they shared city neighborhoods and the vaudeville stage, the Irish and Jews were far more likely to be enemies than friends.<sup>(53)</sup> Yet the popularity of the songs, plays, and films and their often subtle

(51) "Comedies for All," *New York Times*, August 29, 1926, X 1; Ann Nichols, *Abie's Irish Rose: A Novel* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1927), 75-79, 95-98, and 101-06; Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 72-77; Glanz, *Jew and Irish*, 105-06; Curran, *Hibernian Green*, 36; Ted Merwin, "The Performance of Jewish Identity in Anne Nichols's 'Abie's Irish Rose,'" *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20 (Winter 2001): 3-37; Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 104. See also, Lester D. Friedman, *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 58-60; Mari Kathleen Fielder, "Fatal Attraction: Irish-Jewish Romance in Early Film and Drama," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20:4, 6-18; Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 134, 135.

(52) Edward T. O'Donnell, "Abie's Irish Rose," *Irish Echo*, May 19, 2004; *Irish Echo* November 4-10, 2009, 18; "Moe and Jawn Practice Their Abie's Irish Rose Jokes," *Chicago Tribune*, April 15, 1928, A3; Erdman, *Staging the Jew*, 120; "Abie Sings an Irish Song," [1913] Words and Music by Irving Berlin in *Irving Berlin: Early Songs*, ed. Charles Hamm (Madison, WI: Published for the American Musicological Society by A-R Editions, 1994); Mick Maloney, "If It Wasn't for the Irish and the Jews." Cd, Compass Records, 2009. Thanks to Ed O'Donnell, Jo Kibbee, and Jeff Magee for their suggestions. On Berlin's early career, see Michael Freeland, *Irving Berlin* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974). See also, Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 58; Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture*; Williams, "Twas Only an Irishman's Dream," 198-99.

(53) Timothy J. Meagher, "Abie's Irish Enemy: Irish and Jews, Social and Political Realities and Media Representations," in *Screening Irish America: Representing Irish American in Film and Television*, ed. Ruth Barton (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 45-58.



treatments of these relationships indicate some affinity between the two groups, if not in real life, then in the imagination of readers and viewers.

These kinds of films and plays were particularly popular with second generation ethnic audiences in large cities like New York and Chicago. As they constructed their own new identities, they were drawn to older stock ethnic characters like Abie's and Rose's parents who helped them to distance themselves from the first generation in their own communities, while they worked out their attitudes toward their counterparts in other communities. Vaudeville's ethnic cross-dressing reappeared with young Jewish and Irish Catholic characters assuming one another's ethnic backgrounds in unsuccessful efforts to reassure their families. Such performances continued to foreground the available Irish American woman as a vehicle for both comedy and assimilation. "If the melting pot existed," Riv-Ellen Prell concludes, "it was in the cultural imagination of the 1920s."<sup>(54)</sup>

Another possible explanation is considerable anxiety in various ethnic communities over the issue of intermarriage as the ultimate test case for inter-ethnic relations. Discussions of intermarriage in part gauged the attitudes of these groups toward one another. Would the Irish and new immigrants mix and if so, on what basis? What identities would the children of such "mixed marriages" carry?<sup>(55)</sup>

Yet many of the Irish/Jewish plays and films seemed genuinely concerned with using these inter-ethnic love affairs to depict the potential for good relations between the two communities. At their best, these productions conveyed a cultural reaction against the intolerance so widespread in the "Tribal Twenties." In the film version of *Abie's Irish Rose* a young Abie pledges allegiance to the flag alongside Black and Asian youths. Given the strength of ethnic and religious prejudice in these years, it would be a mistake to read too much into these images, but their extreme popularity indicates that many in the second generation immigrant population longed for the tolerance symbolized in such matches.<sup>(56)</sup> Underlying all these performances lay a social

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(54) Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans*, quote, 77. On intermarriage in the third generation and beyond, see Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay on American Religious Sociology* (Chicago: University of California Press, 1955); Harold Abramson, *Ethnic Diversity in Catholic America* (New York: Wiley, 1973), 51-99; Joel Perlmann, "The Romance of Assimilation? Studying the Demographic Outcomes of Ethnic Intermarriage in American History" (Working Paper No. 230 from The Jerome Levy Economics Institute, Bard College, 1988), esp. Table 9 and Perlmann, "Demographic Outcomes of Ethnic Intermarriage in American History: Italian Americans Through Four Generations," Working Paper No. 372, (Levy Institute, 2000), esp. Table 13; Julius Drachsler, *Intermarriage in New York City: A Statistical Survey of the Amalgamation of European Peoples* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1921), 56; Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 68.

(55) For the experiences of an Irish Catholic woman who married her Jewish employer and the struggles of their son in a Catholic school, see "The Experiences of a Jew's Wife," *The American Magazine* 78 (December 1914), 49-53, 83-86. My thanks to Edward T. O'Donnell for directing me to this source.

(56) Bruce M. Stave and John F. Sutherland with Aldo Salerno, eds. *From the Old Country: An Oral history of European Migration to America* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 185-87, 190; Fielder, "Fatal Attraction," 12, 13; Richard Alba, *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 59-61; cf. Michael Hout and Joshua R. Goldstein, "How 4.5 Million Irish Immigrants Became 40 Million Irish Americans: Demographic and Subject Aspects of the Ethnic Composition of White Americans," *American Sociological Review*, 59 (February, 1994), 64-82. Thanks to Gillian Stevens for this citation.

reality: There were far more Irish American women around than was true for most other ethnic communities.

The unusually large stream of young single Irish women entering American cities and their history of intermarriage meant they were viewed as more eligible than most for such matches, especially with men from immigrant groups that had far fewer women. Memories of marriage between Irish women and African American and Chinese likely enhanced their reputation as eligible partners – and fears of racial amalgamation. Irish-Chinese marriages were still fairly common even after the turn of the century, with the couples often living in Chinatown or Irish Catholic communities.<sup>(57)</sup>

Irish women were twice as likely as Irish men to marry outside of the ethnic group and more apt to marry with a broad spectrum of races and nationalities than any of the other ethnic groups. Intermarriage, then, even in small numbers, was highly visible. By the 1920s, in the large Irish American third generation, rates of out-marriage were relatively high, anticipating later patterns of intra-Catholic, interethnic marriages uniting Irish Americans with new immigrants.<sup>(58)</sup> Relations at this most intimate level meant the creation of inter-ethnic families in a generation when such formations were still rare.

## The Silver Screen and Urban Realism

Irish American influence can be discerned on the nation's movie screens, in a new generation of urban realist writers, and in other dimensions of the nation's urban culture by the era of the Great Depression. James Cagney, the nation's most popular movie gangster, and other Irish American actors and actresses became models for millions of immigrant youth. Although Irish Americans played vital roles as actors, directors, and producers in early American films, however, their greatest impact on Hollywood films came not with their efforts on screen, but rather through campaigns for public purity. Catholic efforts resulted in the first censorship law in Chicago as early as 1907. Pressed by demands for federal decency legislation and with an eye on the huge

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(57) Anbinder, *Five Points*, 389-90, 314, 320, 263; Graham Hodges, "'Desirable Companions and Lovers': Irish and African Americans in the Sixth Ward, 1830-1870," in *The New York Irish*, eds. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 107-124; Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 86-89; John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Quimbo Appo's Fear of Fenians: Chinese-Irish-Aglo Relations in New York City," in *New York Irish*, Meagher and Bayor, eds., 128-130; Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery*, 154-60.

(58) Drachler, *Intermarriage in New York City*, passim and especially, 56; Bronwen Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place, and Irish Women*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 34-35; Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 139-40; Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, xiv, 8-9, 30-34, 51; William Z. Ripley, "Races in the United States," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 102 (December, 1908), 745-59; Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*; Abramson, *Ethnic Diversity in Catholic America*, 51-99; Perlmann, "The Romance of Assimilation?," Table 9 and Perlmann, "Demographic Outcomes of Ethnic Intermarriage in American History," Table 13. See also, R. J. R. Kennedy, "Single or Triple Melting Pot? Intermarriage Trends in New Haven, 1870-1940," *American Journal of Sociology* 49:4 (January 1944): 331-39; "Single or Triple Melting Pot? Intermarriage in New Haven, 1870-1950," *American Journal of Sociology* 58:1 (July 1952): 56-59.

audience of first and second generation immigrants in American cities, Hollywood moguls developed their own Hollywood Production or Hays Code in 1930. Written by a Jesuit priest, sold to the industry by a Catholic journalist, the Code represented less an industry prescription than what a film historian called “a statement of Catholic moral philosophy.”<sup>(59)</sup>

Aimed at providing the Church’s seal of approval for Hollywood’s product, the original code was voluntary, so sex and violence remained on the screen through the early Depression. The Church intervened directly in 1934, establishing the Legion of Decency, with its own elaborate code and rating system. Every film received a rating published widely every week. Once each year at Mass, Catholics were required to formally pledge to support the system and many parents used it to monitor their children’s cinema viewing. With 11 million Catholics adhering to the Legion at its height, the industry quickly fell into line with a more rigid Code and an enforcement system overseen by yet another Irish Catholic. In line with conservative Irish sensibilities, the enforcement body showed far more concern with sex than with violence. By 1938 the new code system was reviewing about 98 per cent of all films viewed in United States theatres. Studios also submitted films and sometimes even pre-production scripts directly to the Legion of Decency.<sup>(60)</sup> Beyond indicating the Church’s influence on popular culture by the Depression era, Hollywood’s choice of personnel clearly signaled the critical position of Irish Catholics as arbiters of decency within the culture.

The Irish mark on popular culture was a product of literacy as much as timing and inclination. Irish Americans represented an unusually literate segment of the immigrant working-class population.<sup>(61)</sup> Raised in ethnic urban enclaves, having absorbed a modicum of education, they were now perched between their parents’ struggles and their own uneasy reach for respectability and recognition. Second and third generation Irish American urban authors interpreted much of the transformation of the city – to themselves and their own generation, to the broader middle class society, and eventually to second generation immigrants. They offered realism in its various forms and in the process, they told the stories of not only their own people but of many others as well.

James T. Farrell represented the zenith of this new urban realism, beginning in the 1930s. Raised in poverty in an aging tenement, Farrell was sent to live with his middle class grandparents because his impoverished parents could not provide the upbringing they desired for him. This move out of the old neighborhood and up the social ladder undoubtedly attuned the young writer to the status anxiety of middle class Irish who were often only one step from poverty, but the central theme in Farrell’s famous urban trilogy, *Studs Lonigan* (1930-1935), was the relations

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(59) Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); Curran, *Hibernian Green on the Silver Screen*, quote, 49.

(60) Charles Morris, *American Catholics: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America’s Most Powerful Church* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 196-209; Curran, *Hibernian Green*, 48-52. See also, Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 56-60.

(61) Lawrence McCaffrey, “Diaspora,” 22.

between the Irish and other racial and ethnic groups.

Much of the narrative in *Studs Lonigan* unfolds against the backdrop of the Irish American oscillation between security and terror, their strivings for respectability and their fear of “invasion” by African Americans and more recent European immigrants in a succession of South Side Chicago neighborhoods. Nowhere do the defensive quality and anxieties of Irish American culture emerge more dramatically. The Lonigan family hopes that Father Gilhooley’s construction of a new church and school will anchor their parish and keep theirs a “white man’s neighborhood.” This defensive parochial conception of urban space later shaped opposition to neighborhood racial integration by Catholics from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.<sup>(62)</sup>

Eventually, the Lonigan family’s only recourse seems to be flight, the occasion for a deep sense of loss reminiscent of the exile from Ireland but now with racial undertones after a generation in the city. “Bill, I’d rather let the money I made on this building go to hell and not be moving,” his father tells Studs. “[T]his neighborhood was kind of like home. We sort of felt about it the same way I feel about Ireland, where I was born.” Yet, there was no question of remaining with their African American neighbors. “Hell, there is scarcely a white man left in the neighborhood... Goddamn those niggers!”<sup>(63)</sup>

As in much of Farrell’s fiction, characters and settings are rooted firmly in real locations and in actual experiences. Farrell’s Washington Park neighborhood became a great symbol of the racial divide in the interwar years. It provided the venue for frequent clashes – in Farrell’s epic *Studs Lonigan* trilogy and in real life, as the area around the park changed from largely Irish to more ethnically-mixed and then, increasingly, to African American. The neighborhood’s Black population grew from 15 per cent to 92 per cent in the decade between 1920 and 1930.<sup>(64)</sup> Father Gilhooley and St. Patrick’s stand in for Father Michael Gilmartin of St. Anselm’s Parish. Completed in late 1925 in the midst of racial transformation in Farrell’s Washington Park neighborhood, the new church became one of the largest African American parishes in Chicago by the late 1920s.<sup>(65)</sup> “When he’d bought this building,” Studs’s father Patrick recalls, “Wabash Avenue had been a nice, decent, respectable street for a self-respecting man to live with his

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(62) Farrell, *Studs Lonigan*, 375-376, 455-458, 560; Lauren Onkey, “James Farrell’s *Studs Lonigan* Trilogy and the Anxieties of Race,” *Eire-Ireland* 40 Fall/Winter 2005, 105; John McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century North* (Chicago, 1996), passim. Anxieties about the encroachment of “New Immigrants” were also characteristic of the work of earlier writers like the popular novelist and journalist Maurice Egan who deplored the fact that the immigrant Irish were “fading away before the swarm of newcomers... the outcasts of old nations...” See Fanning, *The Irish Voice*, 205.

(63) Farrell, *Studs Lonigan*, 454, 455.

(64) Charles Fanning and Ellen Skerrett, “James T. Farrell and Washington Park,” *Chicago History* 7 (1979), 87. On the Black migration, see James G. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago, 1922). Washington Park itself became a Mecca for white and especially for African American radicals in the era of the Great Depression. See Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1946) and St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1945).

(65) Edgar M. Branch, *Studs Lonigan’s Neighborhood and the Making of James T. Farrell* (Newton, MA, 1996), 15-16; Ellen Skerrett, “The Catholic Dimension,” in *The Irish in Chicago*, eds., Lawrence McCaffrey, Ellen Skerrett, Michael Funchion, and Charles Fanning, (Urbana, IL, 1987), 52; Charles Fanning, “The Literary Dimension,” in *Ibid*, 128-29.

family. But now, well, niggers and kikes were getting in...”(66)

Irish American creations in song lyrics, prose, and theatre performance were inter-ethnic by nature, with racial difference at their very core. They focused on the relations among the various groups crowded into urban neighborhoods. In the process, a new, multi-ethnic city culture was created. To the extent that immigrant youth from various backgrounds embraced the styles, behavior, values and norms of a new urban culture, they were not those of some distant WASP mainstream, but rather of a newly-emerging hybrid ethnic working-class culture. Irish American interpretations of this new culture on the vaudeville stage and in movies embraced ethnic and racial stereotypes, but also displayed a fascination with urban diversity. They provided both a rather strict moral compass for what appeared on the nation's movie screens, and also the model for the urban movie gangster and for the Hollywood glamour girl who became the idols of immigrant youth. At its best, as in Farrell's unrelenting portrayal of his own community and culture, it could be trenchant, progressive, transcendent. But even at its worst, it shaped much of what it meant to be a young American by the interwar era.

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(66) Farrell, *Studs Lonigan*, 18. See also, Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*.

## 【解説】

### バレット史学と民衆のアメリカニゼーション

本稿の著者であるジェームズ・R・バレットは、現在イリノイ大学シャンペーン・アーバナ校歴史学部で教授を務める、アメリカ移民史、労働民衆史の泰斗である。1950年シカゴに生まれたバレットは、70年代にピッツバーグと英国のコベントリーで大学院生活を送り、E. P. トムソンやデイビッド・モントゴメリー等、「新しい労働史」の先達と交流し、教えを受けた。それは、史学史上の“社会史”の最盛期であった。

この頃からバレットの歴史学は、一貫して名もなき市井の民の目線から、近現代アメリカの都市と労働のリアリズムを追求し続けている。彼の名を一躍有名にした1987年の *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packing House Workers, 1894-1922* (University of Illinois Press, 1987) もまた、20世紀初頭のシカゴ食肉労働者の世界を生き生きと描いた作品だった。同書が画期的だったのは、「下からのアメリカ化」概念を駆使して、移民労働者の階級形成とアメリカ国民意識との密接な関係を明らかにしたことである。20世紀初頭は、南・東欧から大量の移民がアメリカ都市に移住した時期だった。この移民がいかに国民化され、社会的に包摂されていたのかは、アメリカ史の重大テーマの一つである。バレットの場合は移民の包摂と統合の条件を、都市における社会生活の構築や、見苦しくない生活を営む物質的基盤の問題に求め、これを支えたエージェントとして労働組合の社会・経済的機能に注目したのである。それは、従来の研究がアメリカ化を文化ナショナリズムの問題と捉え、移民のエスニシティと WASP 的な正統アメリカの価値規範とを二項対置的に描きがちなことを考えると衝撃的な議論だった。

バレットの学識が特に洗練されているのは、この「下からのアメリカ化」を全く人種・エスニック的に中立な過程とは考えない点である。彼は当初から、新来の南・東欧移民のアメリカ化を促した労組の多くが、アイルランド系の2世、3世代が支配するある種のエスニックな文化メディアでもあったことを指摘していた。そして、バレットの近年の研究は、単に労働組合だけでなく、カトリック教会や大衆演劇、ギャング組織といった多様な、都市インスティテューションに、アイルランド系アメリカ人の文化とソシアビリティが刻み込まれていることに注目し、そうした旧移民の半ばエスニックな社会インフラがいかに現代アメリカの国民統合に関わってきたかを問い直している。2012年2月に刊行された、*The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multi-Ethnic City* (The Penguin Press, 2012) は、まさにその集大成であり、本稿の原型は同書の第4章“Stage”にある。

19世紀中葉以来、 minstrel からヴォードヴィル、そして映画へと姿を変えながらもアメリカの大衆娯楽の中心であり続けた劇場の「舞台」。バレットは、その中心に常にアイルランド系の作家や演者がいたことを強調する。その一方で、彼は人種的、民族的に多様な観客がこの娯楽を消費し、アメリカ都市の規範と文化ニュアンスを学んできた事実にも注目する。つまり、最もアメリカ的と見られがちな大衆文化もまた、彼の言葉によれば「新しいマルチ・エ

スニックな都市文化の形成過程」に生まれたものだったという。本稿でも、新しい移民のアメリカ化は主要なテーマのひとつである。だがここでは、中国人やユダヤ人などを含む多様なアメリカ移住者が、何らかの同化・適応のプロセスを経験したと仮定して、それはあくまで、「ハイブリッドでエスニックな労働階級文化」に対してなのであった。

要するに、バレットのアメリカ国民形成論に「主流」文化なるものの居場所はない。国民形成の主体は、どこまで行っても、アメリカ都市の日常を生きるエスニックな民衆それ自体なのであった。この研究に、1970年代に芽吹いた社会史研究が21世紀に実らせた最良の成果を見るのは可能だろう。

なお、ジェームズ・バレットは、2012年6月～7月に、日本学術振興会外国人招聘研究者プログラム（短期）で来日、大阪大学招聘教授の称号も得て、およそ3週間滞日した。その間、大阪、京都、東京、北海道で精力的な講演活動をこなし、日本の研究者と交流をすすめた。本稿は、そのうち京都の関西アメリカ史研究会で読まれたペーパー（近著の一部を改稿）をさらに修正・縮約したものである。

（中野耕太郎）